

Interstate Disaster Preparedness Planning Status Update January 15, 2008

Hello Workgroup

I wanted to take this opportunity to recap what our workgroup accomplished and provide a status update on our UI Disaster Preparedness project since our last meeting in October.

What our workgroup accomplished:

As you may recall, our workgroup was defining the concept of operations for the UI Disaster Planning Council. To support this effort, the following was accomplished:

- We defined the goals, mission, and vision of the Council.
- We defined the roles and responsibilities, and governance of the Council.
- We developed and discussed business rules, and the mechanics for implementing interstate disaster assistance.
- We defined the functions to be performed by disaster phase.
- We discussed the Emergency Management Assistance Compact (EMAC).
 - The USDOL Dallas Regional Office reported on their disaster preparedness meeting. A key outcome from their meeting was to arrange for a pilot COOP exercise with Louisiana.
 - The second discussion focused on what EMAC is and how EMAC interfaces with the state Emergency Operations Center (EOC). The EMAC service request process was articulated. It was emphasized that UI is not necessarily integrated into the EMAC response. Training and interface between the state EOC (including the EMAC point of contact) and the UI agency is required to ensure the request for assistance does not fall between the cracks and gets serviced. The mechanics for contracting was also reviewed.
- We discussed a new project direction (impetus came from the ITSC Steering Committee) to accelerate the work effort to obtain a tangible product by the spring of 2008. This involved utilizing a sub-workgroup.

New Project Direction:

Shortly thereafter the ITSC formed a sub-workgroup called the 'tiger team', composed of the ITSC, USDOL National Office staff, the UI Directors from California and Rhode Island, and the IT Director from New Jersey. The 'tiger team' is charged with developing draft products for the larger workgroup's discussion, feedback, and consideration.

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Tiger Team Accomplishments:

The first 'tiger team' meeting was held on December 5th. During that meeting the following was accomplished:

- The need for a UIDPC was discussed. The 'tiger team' determined it is more efficient to make use of the existing UI infrastructure for maintaining disaster preparedness than creating a separate standing committee. Therefore, a standing group a 'Council' is not recommended.
- The concept of operations document was replaced with a Mass Unemployment Event (MUE) Toolkit. The Toolkit provides UI agencies with guidance and tools to support continued operations during an MUE.
- The following assumptions were made in developing the MUE Toolkit:
 - The MUE Toolkit can be considered an addendum in" a state's overall Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP).
 - Develop an "eighty-percent" solution that will assist the states with their MUE response. A 100% solution to all possibilities is not practical.
 - In the event of a MUE, the affected state's first priorities would be taking initial and continued claims and making payments. Making address changes and supporting employer separation and wage reporting are high priority functions too.
 - The affected state's telephone and Internet systems are functional, as are its benefits and tax systems.
 - Loss of IT infrastructure is covered by the IT disaster plan.
 - The impacted state will ensure a designated staff person(s) is (are) assigned who is 'reachable' and has access to the decision makers.
- The MUE Toolkit components are being prepared for presentation to the workgroup.
- A UI Disaster Preparedness Planning Assessment Tool is being developed to acquire data for the UI services inventory. The 'tiger team' will present the Assessment Tool to the workgroup for their input. The outcome of the inventory will be used as input to assemble a predefined service package. Standardization of services and a single nomenclature provides for consistency and clarity. A secondary outcome of the inventory will enable UI agencies to consider discussions with other State Workforce Agencies that

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might have the capability to assist them to be prepared for an MUE.

- Contacting options were discussed by the ‘tiger team’. Direct state-to-state contracting was discussed and the ‘tiger team’ believes states may prefer to “contract” for assisting services from another state through the USDOL deobligation processes, which can be engaged upon a presidential issued disaster declaration. Using EMAC as a contracting mechanism is also an option; however some UI agencies may be less interested in capitalizing on the existing EMAC contracts. The EOC and EMAC are first responder oriented; interfacing with the EOC may not be the most efficient means of contracting and implementing a response congruent with the UI agency’s operations.
- Draft disaster services request / response flow diagrams are being developed.
- A central repository for the MUE Toolkit was recommended by the ‘tiger team.’ The centralized repository can be used to support internal communication needs and information sharing.
- A cost estimating tool for services was developed. The average salary, AS&T, NPS, Hourly Cost for initial claims, weekly claims, non monetary, appeals, and tax is stored in the tool. The user enters the hours and the average cost is computed.
- UI Contact Information data collection was discussed. A draft advisory was developed to collect this information via the USDOL Regional Offices and it will be shared for comment.
- External communications guidance was discussed by the ‘tiger team’ and is envisioned as a checklist. If something changes as a result of the MUE, external communications should tell the public what they need to know and what has changed.

Next Steps:

We are preparing draft materials for the workgroup’s review and will be planning a meeting for February 7th at 11:00 ET.